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ABSTRACT

Economic changes in the United States over the past decade and growing concerns about the state of education have led many people to look for successful models for workplace education. As a result, there is a new and deeper interest in apprenticeship training. The form and practice of apprenticeship has changed little over time. Today, as always, young people who seek mastery of a particular trade or skill are trained by experienced practitioners over a period of years, typically 3-5 years before "journeyman" status is reached. Apprenticeship training combines hands-on training, classroom work, and practical work experience, and it is governed by formal standards. The elements of the training are always changing to meet changing conditions. Today the AFL-CIO trains 80 to 90 percent of all registered apprentics in the United States. The training is provided through jointly administered, local union-management apprenticeship committees which help union workers acquire high-level, high-pay skills, and these in turn help to ensure employers a steady stream of highly qualified employees. Centralized funding ensures that training standards are met nationally, while providing training materials at lower cost than if they were produced locally. Instructor training is provided through colleges or universities to journeyworkers who train apprentices. Since the early 1970s, minority groups have increasingly entered union apprenticeship programs; today 22 percent of registered apprentices are minorities and 7 percent are women. Union-sponsored and union-related apprenticeship training for entry workers and skill upgrading for experienced workers will help the nation meet the looming skill shortage of the 1990s. (KC)

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Reviews the Issues

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APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

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Apprenticeship training--"learning-by-doing" under the guidarice of a journey-level worker, combined with formal classroom training--is the oldest form of job training.

In the United States, this method has been extraordinarily successful in preparing hundreds of thousands of workers for high-skill, high-paying jobs. The apprenticeship approach has produced broadly skilled workers who are the best in their fields.

Economic changes in the U.S. over the past decade and growing concerns about the state of education have led many people to look for successful models for workplace education. As a result, there is a new and deeper interest in apprenticeship training.

This situation gives labor unions new opportunities to strengthen their labor market role as a key source for highly skilled craft workers.

Traditional Apprenticeship Training

The form and practice of apprenticeship training has changed little over time. Today, as always, young people who seek mastery of a particular trade or skill are trained by experienced practitioners over a period of years. Typically the apprenticeship lasts 3 to 5 years before "journeyman" status is reached. Apprenticeship training combines hands-on training, classroom work in theoretical concepts and academic skills, and practical work experience.

This is not to say that there is nothing new in the world of apprenticeship training. The elements of the training are constantly changing, reflecting new techniques, materials, and approaches. The AFL-CIO Building Trades-Metal Trades Joint Apprenticeship Committee, which represents organizations with nearly 80 percent of all registered apprentices in the United States, has also been developing jointly administered, locally or regionally based, union-management apprenticeship committees. Today, some 80 to 90 percent of all registered apprentices in the United States receive their training through these Joint Apprenticeship Training Committees (JATC).

These cooperative training efforts have been enormously beneficial to both union members and their employers. These programs help union workers acquire high-level, high-pay skills and also give them additional opportunities to expand these skills. Employers benefit from the fact that the quality of these programs is widely recognized and assures them a steady stream of highly qualified employees.

Elements of Apprenticeship Training

Apprenticeship programs are formal arrangements with standard lengths of participation; agreements defining the rights and duties of the JATC and of the apprentice; and a set progression in pay, levels of learning, and skills obtained. These programs are recognized as formal because they are registered at either the state or federal level, and in some cases, both.

Various conditions are attached to apprenticeship programs so registered. For example, the apprentice is obligated to sign an "apprenticeship agreement" which spells out the terms and conditions of employment and training. Also, the program must be broadly focused in nature. That means that it cannot be specific only to a process at one company, but must be an occupation which is clearly identifiable and "commonly recognized throughout an industry." [New York State Department of Labor]

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Other conditions applying to apprenticeship programs include a specified curriculum which describes the specific steps of advancement and length of each unit. Also, the program must conform to all laws regarding equal opportunity. Completion rates and ratios of apprentices to journeymen are also tracked to insure quality in these programs. Apprentices are often allowed access to arbitration should the normal grievance procedure fail to resolve disputes relating to the apprentice.

Another concern of the local and national JATC is that men and women who are trained through union programs should enter union jobs. Therefore, some apprenticeship contracts stipulate that a person who receives training must fully reimburse the apprenticeship trust fund for all training expenses if he or she works for a nonunion firm.

Training Funds

Nearly all of the traditional construction craft unions have established joint national training funds with contractors' associations at local, regional, and national levels. A key advantage of these funds, and the national centers developed with them, is that they permit standardization of core apprenticeship curriculum, while still allowing local JATC autonomy to design programs to develop skills demanded in local areas.

This dual national-local system has become common to the apprenticeship system in unionized industries. It is a practical, workable, pragmatic approach. There is no way that the national training trust can be aware of all the particular needs or problems at the local level, so it is left to the JATC to devise special courses.

On the other hand, the central fund can help assure that national minimum standards are set. In some cases, national and international unions prepare textbooks and other training materials for use nation-wide. The existence of uniform training materials and procedures gives journey-level workers geographic mobility and the ability to adjust to labor-market conditions in different localities.

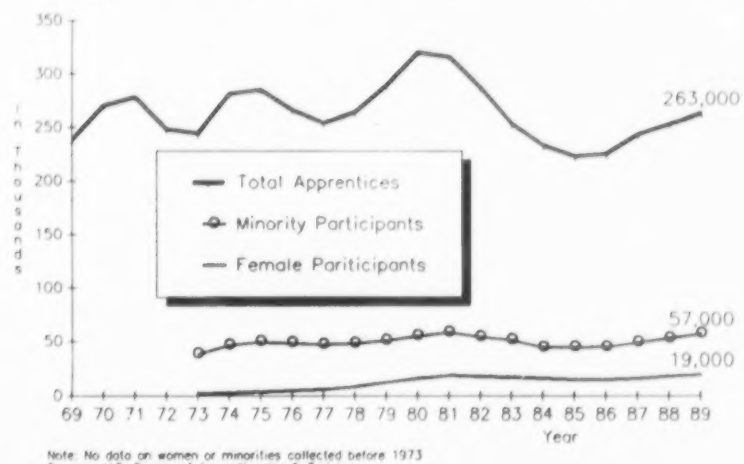
Further, the concentrated buying power of national funds makes production of training material cheaper to obtain. Some unions, such as the Sheet Metal Workers through their National Training Fund, have also developed special mobile training outfits to teach specialized skills, such as welding techniques, that can be taught at job sites. Many have also developed permanent facilities across the United States and Canada to which even journeymen can go to learn new skills.

Who Conducts Apprenticeship Training?

Apprenticeship training is not limited to craft unions such as the Carpenters, Iron Workers, Bricklayers, and others. Manufacturing unions also run apprenticeship programs. Often the details of these programs are worked out in local contract negotiations. These include the responsibilities of the JATC, qualifications of applicants, the length and content of the apprenticeship contract, and even issues such as who pays for the tools the trainee will need.

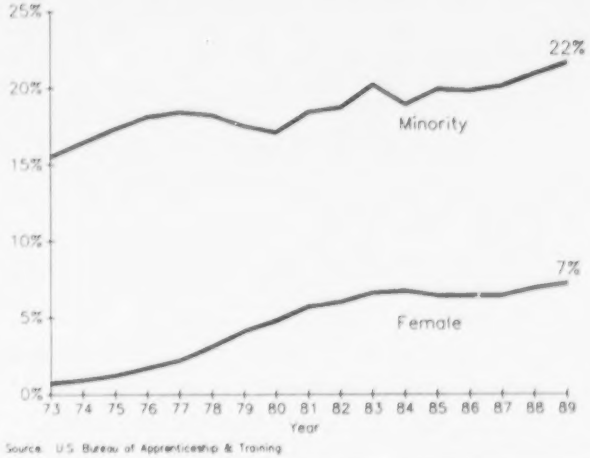
Apprenticeable positions in these industries include tool and die makers, model makers, and other crafts such as machinists and mechanics. At most of these manufacturing plants, apprentices are drawn from the current work force with preference given on a seniority basis to those who pass basic knowledge tests.

Total Apprentices in the United States, 1969-1989



Note: No data on women or minorities collected before 1973
Source: U.S. Bureau of Apprenticeship & Training

Minorities and Women in Apprenticeships



Source: U.S. Bureau of Apprenticeship & Training

In the printing and newspaper industry, the Graphic Communications International Union runs a variety of apprenticeship programs in offset printing, bindery, flexigraphic printing, and others. A unique aspect of the GCIU's program is a four-year, 16-lesson correspondence course which enables members to achieve the equivalent of roughly 144 hours of classroom work.

The Clothing and Textile Workers at Xerox in Rochester, New York, run some of their courses through the Rochester Institute of Technology; and all aspects of the apprenticeship program are done on company time. In the high-tech field, Machinist apprentices receive state-of-the-art electronics training through programs run in conjunction with Boeing.

Apprenticeship programs also cover such areas as the baking industry, with programs run, for example, by the Bakery and Confectionery Workers. This listing merely scratches the surface of the areas in which apprenticeship training is applicable. Everyone from Auto Workers to Roofers to Operating Engineers use this method to train highly skilled workers.

Teacher Training

Most of the union apprenticeship programs are fully staffed by experienced journey-level members who have acquired a lifetime of skills. However, being a great craftsperson does not always mean that one is also a great teacher. To help their members get the skills needed to teach effectively, instructor training is provided to journeymen usually through an accredited college or university.

For example, the Sheet Metal Workers have a long-standing partnership with Ohio State University; and the Iron Workers have a similar program at the University of San Diego. These teacher training programs continue over a period of years (usually five years, with sessions lasting for about one week each year) before the journeyman obtains the status of "certified instructor." Post-graduate and refresher courses are offered to sharpen skills and acquaint instructors with emerging technologies in their occupations and industries.

The quality of training that these programs provide is evidenced by the fact that skilled union trades workers are always sought for the most technically difficult jobs and those jobs which require the highest standards of craftsmanship, such as nuclear power plants, sophisticated building techniques, or highly sophisticated electronic technology.

Women, Minorities, and Apprenticeship Training

Since the end of the 1960s, minorities have come to play a large role in joint apprenticeship programs. In the early 1960s, minorities comprised only 2 percent of all federally registered apprenticeship trainees.

This began to change by 1969 when the AFL-CIO, international unions, civil rights groups, and the federal government all began working together to actively recruit blacks and other minorities into apprenticeship programs. Today, according to the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training (BAT), 22 percent of all registered apprentices are minorities. Women, who in 1967 made up less than 1 percent of apprenticeship trainees, now are 7 percent of the total.

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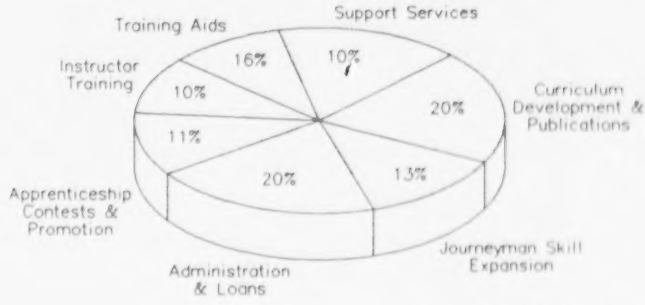
Typical Expenditure Breakdown for a National Training Fund



Source: AFL-CIO Estimates

Although these gains are significant, a lack of interest by the Reagan Administration in enforcement of affirmative action and cutbacks in BAT personnel reduced support for recruitment and outreach necessary to enroll women and minorities.

New Interest in the Apprenticeship Model

The Department of Labor and the Department of Education in recent years have released a steady stream of alarming data relating to the low levels of academic achievement among both our existing work force and those newly entering and expected to enter up to the year 2000. One overlooked aspect in this type of literature is the fact that some 75 percent of the work force in the year 2000 are already on the job.

This is particularly troubling because the areas of projected job growth such as the health care industry, data processing, high-tech machine repair, and high-skilled production workers all require a high level of both basic skills and specific training.

Most of the workers who will fill these jobs are now out of school. So issues of low basic skills levels and functional illiteracy, not to mention the problem of obtaining new skills, cannot be addressed merely through school reforms. Many people will have to find education and job-related training where they work.

This mix of related training and on-the-job training is precisely what the apprenticeship system is all about. The Human Resource Development Institute of the AFL-CIO is currently working with various unions and the Department of Labor to develop new models of structured workplace training while ensuring that the quality of existing apprenticeship programs is maintained.

Conclusion

Union-sponsored and union-related apprenticeship training for workers newly entering the labor market and skill-upgrading for experienced workers will help the nation meet the looming skill shortage of the 1990s.

Minorities and women, who make up an increasing proportion of the labor force and increasing proportion of total union membership, will be entering these training programs more and more to help meet the nation's skill needs and to speed their own progress into the mainstream of American life.

Apprenticeship training is the road to higher pay and broader skills for workers in all types of industries and occupations. The federal government's renewed interest in apprenticeship training and growing national concerns over competitiveness puts unions in a strong position for a continuing leadership role in expanding and strengthening the time-tested apprenticeship training system.

The nation's commitment to education and skill training has the full support of America's unions. The union commitment to apprenticeship skill training is good for the nation--and also good for unions which become the chief source for highly skilled craft workers.

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